

# THE STATE OF THE UNION

## GETTING RID OF THE MEXICAN

BY CAREY McWILLIAMS

Los Angeles

IN 1930 a fact-finding committee reported to the Governor of California that, as a result of the passage of the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, Mexicans were being used on a large scale in the Southwest to replace the supply of cheap labor that had been formerly recruited in Southeastern Europe. The report revealed a concentration of this new immigration in Texas, Arizona, and California, with an ever increasing number of Mexicans giving California as the State of their "intended future permanent residence." It was also discovered that, within the State, this new population was concentrated in ten southern counties.

For a long time Mexicans had regarded Southern California, more particularly Los Angeles, with favor, and during the decade from 1919 to 1929 the facts justified this view. At that time there was a scarcity of cheap labor in the region, and Mexicans were made welcome. When cautious observers pointed out some of the consequences that might reasonably be expected to follow from a rash encouragement of this immigration, they were shouted down by the wise men of the Chamber of Commerce. Mexican labor was eulogized as cheap, plentiful, and docile. Even so late as 1930 little effort had been made to unionize it. The Los Angeles shopkeepers joined with the industrialists in denouncing, as a union labor conspiracy, the agitation to place Mexican immigration on a

quota basis. Dr. Paul S. Taylor quotes this typical utterance from a merchant:

Mexican business is for cash. They don't criticize prices. You can sell them higher priced articles than they intended to purchase when they came in. They spend every cent they make. Nothing is too good for a Mexican if he has the money. They spend their entire pay-check. If they come into your store first, you get it. If they go to the other fellow's store first, he gets it.

During this period, academic circles in Southern California exuded a wondrous solicitude for the Mexican immigrant. Teachers of sociology, social service workers, and other subsidized sympathizers were deeply concerned about his welfare. Was he capable of assimilating American idealism? What anti-social traits did he possess? Wasn't he made morose by his native diet? What could be done to make him relish spinach and Brussels sprouts? What was the percentage of this and that disease, or this and that crime, in the Mexican population of Los Angeles? How many Mexican mothers fed their youngsters according to the diet schedules promulgated by manufacturers of American infant foods? In short, the do-gooders subjected the Mexican population to a relentless barrage of surveys, investigations, and clinical conferences.

But a marked change has occurred since 1930. When it became apparent last year that the programme for the relief of the unemployed would assume huge proportions in the Mexican quarter, the community swung to a determination to oust the Mexican. Thanks to the rapacity of his overlords, he had not been able to accumu-

late any savings. He was in default in his rent. He was a burden to the taxpayer. At this juncture, an ingenious social worker suggested the desirability of a wholesale deportation. But when the Federal authorities were consulted they could promise but slight assistance, since many of the younger Mexicans in Southern California were American citizens, being the American-born children of immigrants. Moreover, the Federal officials insisted, in cases of illegal entry, upon a public hearing and a formal order of deportation. This procedure involved delay and expense, and, moreover, it could not be used to advantage in ousting any large number.

A better scheme was soon devised. Social workers reported that many of the Mexicans who were receiving charity had signified their "willingness" to return to Mexico. Negotiations were at once opened with the social-minded officials of the Southern Pacific Railroad. It was discovered that, in wholesale lots, the Mexicans could be shipped to Mexico City for \$14.70 *per capita*. This sum represented less than the cost of a week's board and lodging. And so, about February, 1931, the first trainload was dispatched, and shipments at the rate of about one a month have continued ever since. A shipment, consisting of three special trains left Los Angeles on December 8. The loading commenced at about six o'clock in the morning and continued for hours. More than twenty-five such special trains had left the Southern Pacific station before last April.

No one seems to know precisely how many Mexicans have been "repatriated" in this manner to date. The Los Angeles *Times* of November 18 gave an estimate of 11,000 for the year 1932. The monthly shipments of late have ranged from 1,300 to 6,000. The *Times* reported last April that altogether more than 200,000 *repatria-*

*dos* had left the United States in the twelve months immediately preceding, of which it estimated that from 50,000 to 75,000 were from California, and over 35,000 from Los Angeles county. Of those from Los Angeles county, a large number were charity deportations.

The repatriation programme is regarded locally as a piece of consummate statescraft. The average per family cost of executing it is \$71.14, including food and transportation. It cost Los Angeles county \$77,249.29 to repatriate one shipment of 6,024. It would have cost \$424,933.70 to provide this number with such charitable assistance as they would have been entitled to had they remained—a saving of \$347,468.41.

One wonders what has happened to all the Americanization programmes of yesterday. The Chamber of Commerce has been forced to issue a statement assuring the Mexican authorities that the community is in no sense unfriendly to Mexican labor and that repatriation is a policy designed solely for the relief of the destitute—even, presumably, in cases where invalids are removed from the County Hospital in Los Angeles and carted across the line. But those who once agitated for Mexican exclusion are no longer regarded as the puppets of union labor.

What of the Mexican himself? The repatriation programme, apparently, is a matter of indifference to this amiable ex-American. He never objected to exploitation while he was welcome, and now he acquiesces in repatriation. He doubtless enjoys the free train ride home. Probably he has had his fill of bootleg liquor and of the mirage created by pay-checks that never seemed to buy as much as they should. Considering the anti-social character commonly attributed to him by the sociological myth-makers, he has coöper-

erated nicely with the authorities. Thousands have departed of their own volition. In battered Fords, carrying two and three families and all their worldly possessions, they are drifting back to *el terrenaso*—the big land. They have been shunted back and forth across the border for so many years by war, revolution, and the law of supply and demand, that it would seem that neither expatriation or repatriation held any more terror for them.

The Los Angeles industrialists confidently predict that the Mexican can be lured back, "whenever we need him." But I am not so sure of this. He may be placed on a quota basis in the meantime, or possibly he will no longer look north to Los Angeles as the goal of his dreams. At present he is probably delighted to abandon an empty paradise. But it is difficult for his children. A friend of mine, who was recently in Mazatlan, found a young Mexican girl on one of the southbound trains crying because she had had to leave Belmont High-School. Such an abrupt severance of the Americanization programme is a contingency that the professors of sociology did not anticipate.



### SUPER-MOSES

BY OLIVER JENKINS

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**I**F SOME ribald prankster should sneak up on the very proper old lady that is New Hampshire and hoist her skirts to her dimpled knees she would squeal no more shrilly than she did last November when a Democrat bagged a seat in the United States Senate, displacing her incomparable son, the Hon. George Higgins Moses. I recall a pre-election editorial in a patriarchal Massachusetts daily,

whose name eludes me, wherein the idea was pooh-poohed that anyone with so commonplace a name as Fred Brown could hope to succeed a Moses. As for Mr. Moses himself, he had long before defied these prolific tribes. "Bring on your Browns and Smiths and Joneses," said he, "and I will lick them all!" But he didn't.

Mr. Brown walks along Main street in Concord, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his cravat awry, his battered slouch hat yanked down over his face, which is bumpy and tinged with a McIntosh red. Low upon the bridge of his generous nose he wears horn-rimmed glasses which he rarely uses, preferring to peer over them. By this device he achieves glances full of suspicion. He is, indeed, suspicious of everybody, every proposal, exploring for an ulterior motive, which as a matter of fact, he usually finds. To passersby and their syrupy greetings he replies with barely a nod. When he is cornered, "Well," he says, "what's the dope? What d'you hear?"

In a campaign he is a bearcat, tearing along day and night. He loves the smell of political blood. Unlike most politicians, he is not open to flattery. Approach him with a glowing report on a community and he will say, "Blankville? Listen, those babies have only one interest and that is in getting their fists round some long green. The last boys in town with the little black bags carry away the votes."

Shrewd and blunt, he seldom misses a trick, and many a pompous representative of the power utilities has shaken in his boots on facing him. The common people like him because he talks to them without prettifying. At the same time he refuses to make any concessions to them. In last Fall's campaign his stock speech ran forty minutes. He was adamant to suggestions that he cut it. If people wanted to walk